

Complex

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sophomore Brooke Ireland. "Now we're bringing that same thing outside," said Ireland, a Sturgis native. "I think it speaks to how this program is growing. It's the start of a whole new cycle for us, in recruiting and in competing on the highest level."

On the other hand, the Coyote men's and women's programs have long been successful without their own outdoor track.

Women's head coach Lucky Huber – entering his 22nd year – has guided USD to 10 indoor conference titles and six outdoor titles, while Gottsleben has led the men to 21 total conference championships.

Sure, maybe most of those league titles have come in indoor meets, but perhaps the new outdoor track will eventually even out those numbers.

"Maybe that (Dome) overcame the lack of an outdoor facility, but now having both will make it very special," Gottsleben said.

Much like the 6,000-seat basketball and volleyball arena being constructed to the south of the DakotaDome, the outdoor track and soccer complex has required patience for those waiting to take advantage.

"We're like little kids on Christmas Eve," Huber said. "We can go stand out there and look at it, take some pictures, but we can't quite get on it yet."

The most recent work done to the track complex, in particular, has been the installation of the red surface coating and the irrigation system. The lanes will soon be painted and by winter, the fencing will have been installed around the complex, according to Brian Boe, superintendent with Mortenson Construction.

Sod will then be laid down so it can take over the winter months, and by the time spring rolls around, USD athletes will be able to start running, jumping and throwing at the facility that is already being billed as one of the premier complexes in the nation.

Even for long-time coaches like Gottsleben who have seen the top venues in the country, the best way he could describe the USD facility was "wow."

"People don't quite understand how special that place really is," he said. "I'm sure they will in time."

"This whole dream will be unbelievable for the university, for the city, the state and the whole Midwest. The whole thing is just phenomenal. This will be the front porch to the University of South Dakota."

DAVE GOTTSLEBEN



The Vision

From the onset of USD's venture into Division I, track was out in front of every other program. Ahead of football. Ahead of basketball.

Five months after receiving permission to move to that level, USD announced in April 2007 that it had selected outdoor track to accelerate for post-season competition. NCAA legislation allowed a school to select one male and one female sport – other than football or basketball – to fast-track. It is the same policy that allows Division II schools like Minnesota State Mankato or Minnesota-Duluth to play D-I hockey.

At USD, though, outdoor track was the selection.

During those hectic years of the D-I transition, success didn't slow down inside the track programs, and neither did the vision of an outdoor track complex in Vermillion.

"I can't say enough about President (Jim) Abbott and (athletic director) David Herbster," Huber said. "They had the mindset that you don't just build a track, you build a really, really good track."

"That's what this whole (Division I) transition has been about, we can do this or do that, but we're going to do this right."

And that didn't mean simply hurrying – as much as the programs may have wanted to – to construct a basic complex that wouldn't have included every little feature the coaches may have wanted, Huber said.

And it also didn't mean building an outdoor track off campus. It had to be on campus, Huber said. As an example, he said he visited two Big 12 Conference schools this summer where the track complex is 10-20 minutes away from campus.

"Ours is meant to be the highlight of coming onto our campus," Huber said.

The location of USD's complex

is right off Highway 50, to the east of the DakotaDome across University Street. In other words, the unofficial welcome to campus, Gottsleben said.

"This will be the front porch to the University of South Dakota," he said. "That was the intent of the president, to have it look good and be good."

That was the dream all those years, when Gottsleben was hauling athletes over to Vermillion High School.

"This whole dream will be unbelievable for the university, for the city, the state and the whole Midwest," Gottsleben said. "The whole thing is just phenomenal."

The Amenities

While describing every quirk and aspect to the new complex, Gottsleben called it the "Cadillac of tracks."

"It certainly is one of the best in America," he added.

During any planning phase, certain features may be naturally modified or even deemed unnecessary, but as Huber pointed out, he hasn't once sat through a meeting where something in USD's track complex was cut.

"We've stayed with this vision," he said.

And a key component to that vision was to make USD's outdoor track complex fan-friendly. What USD designed was a facility where every field event – jumps, throws, pole vault – was inside the main oval, which would mean a fan in the bleachers could see every event.

"We wanted a spot where our fans can sit and see everything," Huber said.

While that feature alone makes USD's facility unique, Gottsleben said it's the addition of a training lane that will truly separate USD from the rest of the country. Kansas State is the only other school that has one, he said.

The six-foot wide training lane,

on the west end of the track, has an incline and a decline that will enable runners to practice going uphill and downhill, Gottsleben said.

Even the track surface itself is one area where USD – and the donors for the project – spared no expense. USD purchased the Beynon Sports Surfaces 200 model, which is the state-of-the-art model seen, for example, at the famous Hayward Field at the University of Oregon.

The Beynon website claims that users will "get the optimal performance from your athletes for years to come with its ability to withstand even the toughest climates" – ideal for the South Dakota weather. "This is a surface where you can train on and maybe not have some of the lower leg problems, but also run fast on it," Gottsleben said.

As far as just how fast, USD will also have the latest timing technology to benefit fans, timers, coaches and athletes. It will have fully automatic timing (FAT) in every corner, Gottsleben said. It will also have chip timing, most commonly seen in larger meets or larger road races, that enables people to track the order of every race, Huber said.

All of those little amenities to the project wouldn't have been possible without six donors who gave six figures each, according to Gottsleben said.

"They knew getting involved in this would be pretty special," he said.

The Recruiting

Brennan Schmidt wanted a chance to compete at the highest level. It didn't matter necessarily if there was a sparkling new track waiting. But on the other hand, it certainly didn't hurt, said the USD freshman from Freeman.

"It was definitely a plus," said Schmidt, a state record-holder in the 400-meter dash.

"When you commit to a school, it's more education based, the team and the coaches, but the facil-

ity had a little bit to do with that."

While USD's new complex may eventually persuade an athlete from choosing, say, a Big Ten school, it was the opportunity to progress in the D-I waters that convinced Schmidt – who could have gone to a number of D-I schools – to decide on USD.

"That was a big thing for me," Schmidt said. "that I would be able to go to that level."

"When I was in high school, I never really had to push myself, but now I get to see where all this can take me."

Much like coaches in the USD basketball and volleyball programs have been showing recruits schematics of the new arena, the track coaches have been able to use the track renderings.

"I looked at the pictures of their plans, and knew it's going to be sweet," Schmidt said. "It's bait, but it wasn't the main reason (chose USD)."

And so in that way, it's not as though the recruiting benefits of the new complex are years away.

"It has had an impact already," Gottsleben said. "This incoming class that are freshmen, we had an impact even then, because they could see the plan and now they're seeing it to its fruition."

While there's an argument to be made that the DakotaDome presents its own recruiting advantages for track recruits (year-round use, etc.), some of those high school standouts like Ireland didn't know life without an outdoor facility.

"When I was in high school, we had our own track, and it was weird not to see one at USD," Ireland said. "But to be part of the process on both sides is such a blessing."

In a sport like track and field, there would be certain events that USD might be able to entice a recruit to Vermillion because of certain advantages – pole vault, with USD's successes since the D-I transition, would be an example. But as Huber said, perhaps the new facility might mean USD is competing with bigger-name schools for a specific athlete.

"We're always trying to recruit against those bigger schools," Huber said. "We try to put ourselves in that conversation."

While a new track facility wouldn't be the sole reason a recruit chooses USD, it's certainly a benefit, Ireland said.

"Knowing we'll have this great facility definitely helped bring me here," she said. "I can imagine it was the same thing for other recruits."

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